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SUBJECT: ACTING CENTCOM COMMANDER GENERAL DEMPSEY MEETS
WITH ICRC IN TASHKENT

REF: A. TASHKENT 866
[1](#)B. TASHKENT 704
[1](#)C. TASHKENT 344
[1](#)D. TASHKENT 324

Classified By: Political Officer Tim Buckley for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On August 28 visiting Acting CENTCOM Commander General Martin Dempsey met with Yves Giovannoni, the ICRC Head of the Regional Delegation in Central Asia, and Raffaello Muller, the Deputy Head. The meeting, which itself sent a strong signal of USG interest to the Uzbeks, focused on the status of ICRC's prison visits at a critical juncture when the six-month trial period is drawing to a close amidst tough negotiations with the Government of Uzbekistan about an extension. Giovannoni does not believe Uzbekistan "has a genuine intent" to reform but rather is motivated by a desire for "geostrategic cooperation" with the West. Nonetheless, he said ICRC is taking advantage of the opportunity and has built a positive relationship with Ministry of Internal Affairs officials who administer penitentiaries. The real challenge, he noted, was in convincing the National Security Service (NSS) to provide access to its interrogation and detention facilities. Without such access, Giovannoni noted that ICRC would gradually cease its prison visits in Uzbekistan to "avoid becoming a fig leaf." ICRC appreciated General Dempsey's willingness to raise this issue during his official meetings, and they also requested that we emphasize with GOU contacts that improving prison conditions can reduce the risk that religious prisoners could become radicalized. End summary.

Six-Month Trial Draws to a Close

[1](#)2. (C) On August 28 Acting CENTCOM Commander General Dempsey met with Giovannoni and Muller to discuss the status of ICRC's prison visits in Uzbekistan. (Comment: Muller also met with former CENTCOM Commander Admiral William Fallon in

January, which we believe contributed to ICRC's breakthrough six-month trial agreement with Uzbekistan that is now drawing to a close. End comment.) The meeting comes at a pivotal period, as the six-month trial for prison visits ends on September 11 but negotiations to broaden the scope of ICRC's activities have not progressed.

Limited Success in Penitentiaries

¶3. (C) Giovannoni stated that the ICRC's primary government interlocutor, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Abdukarim Shodiev (who oversees the prison directorate), acted according to "clear signals from above" and exhibited "a very positive attitude." Shodiev wanted to meet with ICRC every few weeks to discuss the progress of prison visits. ICRC had access to 28 penitentiaries around the country encompassing 80 percent of Uzbekistan's total estimated prison population.

Yet even with a productive relationship with the Ministries of Internal and Foreign Affairs, Giovannoni noted that the Presidential Apparat and the NSS need to be on board.

(Comment: This tracks with our experience in dealing with the government; a recent parallel is the proposed return of the DEA, which all interlocutors supported only to have the NSS nix it from the shadows. End comment.)

Still No Access to Interrogation Centers

¶4. (C) Giovannoni noted that there are eight NSS interrogation centers that ICRC was not able to access during the six-month trial period, as well as 128 police stations and other temporary places of detention. While discussions have been initiated on visiting the latter, which are not particularly sensitive, Giovannoni lamented that the NSS remains unwilling even to start negotiations. He said he "does not think there is a genuine intention" on the part of the Government of Uzbekistan to implement reforms; rather, he sees the Uzbeks as motivated by the appearance of "geostrategic cooperation" with the U.S. and Europe. Nonetheless, Giovannoni said ICRC believes if it can work according to its modalities it can address some problems. Yet if the NSS does not come to the table, Giovannoni said ICRC would gradually (to give the Uzbeks time to rethink their stance) suspend its program "to avoid being used as a fig leaf."

U.S. Plays a Key Role

¶5. (C) While ICRC expects continued difficulties trying to convince the NSS to cooperate, Giovannoni noted that the U.S. may be able to again play a key role in facilitating negotiations. Although the European Union included the resumption of ICRC prison visits as a factor in its decision to lift sanctions, Giovannoni believes the U.S. "has more weight" and can significantly influence the ICRC's capability to conduct an effective humanitarian program. (Comment: Like other foreign diplomats in Tashkent, Muller told poloff that the Ambassador's highly-publicized meeting with the President in July indicated an increase in perceived U.S. influence. End comment.) Giovannoni recommended that General Dempsey express USG interest in Uzbekistan continuing cooperation according to the confidential conditions the two parties discussed.

No Focus on Rehabilitation

¶6. (C) Muller described some of the flaws in the Uzbek penal system, which he characterized as "a repressive system" with "no attitude of reinsertion into society and no effort to rehabilitate." He added that those detainees who are released "are nobodies," lacking in documentation and employment prospects. This is in stark contrast to the Government of Uzbekistan's oft-restated boasts about reforms and liberalization of the criminal justice system, Muller said, cautioning that "there is a distinction between the

reality and paper." Even the name of the correction directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, he pointed out, includes the word punishment ("GUIN," a Russian acronym for the Main Department of Incarceration and Punishment). Muller also said corruption results in conditions inside prisons that should not exist, and even the occasional amnesties "are subject to negotiation" as long as the prisoner is not high-profile.

Other Stans

17. (C) In response to General Dempsey's question about the Central Asian regional perspective, Giovannoni noted that Kazakhstan has implemented substantive penal reforms and that there are far fewer "security detainees" compared to Uzbekistan. He explained that ICRC has worked in Kyrgyzstan for nine years and achieved "a good dialogue." In contrast, ICRC has not had any access to Turkmenistan, but Giovannoni will travel to Ashgabat at the end of the year to attempt to make inroads. The organization has not had any access to Tajikistan in the past 15 years other than a brief nine month window which quickly closed, according to Giovannoni. He also noted that Uzbekistan is "very well organized" compared to their regional peers, but the seasoned 22-year ICRC veteran added that "rarely have I seen a worse situation."

Radicalization

18. (C) The Ambassador noted that there are an estimated three to seven thousand religious prisoners accused of membership in radical organizations and asked if ICRC examined whether Uzbek prisons are actually increasing the number of radical Islamic adherents. Giovannoni said he does not believe that the Government of Uzbekistan fully understands that prison can be a radicalizing experience and urged U.S. officials to convey this to official interlocutors as much as possible. Muller emphasized that if Uzbekistan cooperates with the ICRC to improve prison conditions it would have a corresponding benefit to state security, which the Uzbeks value above all else.

Comment:

19. (C) The ICRC has had partial success during the course of its six-month trial period for prison visits. We believe the visits have already positively impacted prison conditions in penitentiaries, albeit modestly, and ICRC has benefited from the opportunity to build relations with contacts in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. However, ICRC does not yet have access to National Security Service detention facilities. The next few weeks will be an important test of the Government of Uzbekistan's commitment to address torture and abuse in its prisons; we will continue to press for GOU cooperation that will allow the ICRC's prison visits to continue.

110. (U) This telegram was cleared by Acting CENTCOM Commander General Martin Dempsey.

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